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ABSTRACT

An argument is made for involving young adolescents in community service programs, either school-based or community-based. Content focuses on: (1) a rationale for youth community service; (2) the young adolescent and community service; (3) appropriate roles for young adolescents; (4) sponsorship of youth community service; (5) the placement site and the students; (6) community service in middle school reform; (7) community-based programs; and (8) barriers to community service. Described in detail is the Early Adolescent Helper Program at the City University of New York's Center for Advanced Study in Education, a program that has promoted youth service for young adolescents since 1982. Extensive attention is given to school-based and community-based programs. It is concluded that a strong program of community service, structured to give every young adolescent an opportunity to participate and to experience the empowerment that comes with making a difference, can be a positive step toward addressing some of the critical problems facing society and youth. Establishing community service as an integral part of the program in middle level schools could constitute an important first step in true reform. (RH)

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YOUNG ADOLESCENTS AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Joan Schine

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COMMUNITY SERVICE FOR YOUNG ADOLESCENTS
A Background Paper

A Rationale for Youth Community Service

It is only within recent memory - perhaps since the third decade of this century - that the individual emerging from childhood has lacked a well-defined social role. No longer is the productive work of most families close to home, involving all members according to their capacities. "When ours was still an agrarian society, the needs of youth were necessarily subordinate to the economic struggle, and the rudimentary occupational requisites permitted them to be brought quickly into adult productivity." (President's Science Advisory Committee, 1973, p. 1) As their role in the community diminished, young people became increasingly isolated, and, too often, alienated. Harold Howe II delineates the problem:

> In a society based on the work ethic, work helps to define each one of us. To the extent that we do something useful to the society, we gain a feeling of belonging and contributing that sustains us even when the work we do is difficult or dull...[Y]outh has been progressively denied the opportunity to be engaged in work that is important to others and therefore denied the rewards such work produces. I think that some of youth's negative tendencies today can be traced to this situation. (Howe, 1986, p. 7)

Adolescents who help to care for young children, who assist the handicapped, serve in soup kitchens, tutor their peers or younger children, visit with the aging, assist shut-ins, participate in programs to educate their communities about substance abuse, organize an action campaign to rehabilitate a building, improve a playground, clean up a stream, or advocate for the homeless, are filling the void that our age of technology and specialization has created in their lives; like their counterparts of an earlier era, they are assuming meaningful roles and responding to real needs of their society as well as to their own need to be needed.

While the primary reason to promote the involvement of adolescents in community service is to provide an opportunity to assume meaningful roles, the rationale for such involvement is multi-faceted. One aspect of this rationale lies in the changed and still changing nature of our communities: Traditionally, we in this country have depended upon volunteers for a wide range of services, for creative solutions to community problems, for raising funds for a host of social programs, and for political action. The need for such services continues unabated and will probably increase in the years ahead as greater numbers of the very young and the old require services that were once provided in the home.

In view of concern about the federal deficit, and the focus on "belt-tightening" and "bottom line" in the corporate world, it is unlikely that government or private sector intervention will be

sufficient to meet these needs. At the same time, the available pool of volunteers is shrinking. More women, once the mainstay of voluntary efforts, are entering the paid labor force. There is some evidence that the "me first" culture, and an accompanying materialism, has embedded itself in the ethos of the 1980s.

Our population is growing at an annual rate of 11% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980), but Independent Sector reports no growth in the number of individuals volunteering between 1985 and 1987, although there was some increase in the total number of hours of volunteer work. (Olcott, 1988, p. 8) The hope for perpetuating the volunteer tradition, then, lies with our young people. Experiencing the satisfactions of making a contribution and of making a difference in the teen years can encourage a commitment that will carry into adult life.

There are, then, clear benefits to the society through youth community service. For the young person, there are multiple benefits in addition to the increase in self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment: Community service provides opportunities for career exploration, for learning the attitudes and behaviors of the world of work. It challenges him or her to work collegially with others, to learn to compromise and to communicate successfully. It encourages the acquisition and exercise of new skills. It presents "real world" opportunities to confront problems, consider alternatives, and find solutions.

Many of the problems that confront us today appear to be nearly insurmountable. Future generations will need to face them with confidence that they can unite to achieve common goals and can create change. Identifying problems and meeting the needs of others teaches that lesson more effectively than any sermon or lecture can. However, for young people to learn most effectively from their participation in community service they must have opportunities to reflect thoughtfully upon the meaning of their work. This will be discussed at greater length in a subsequent section of this paper.

The Young Adolescent and Community Service

The preceding paragraphs have presented the case for community service for youth, but there are specific arguments to be made for expanding opportunities for the youngest adolescents to take active, contributing roles in the community. Research and experience in recent years have brought new awareness of the unique needs and traits of the 11- to 14-year-old. The work of Joan Lipsitz and colleagues at the Center for Early Adolescence at the University of North Carolina, of Conrad Toepfer, Jacquelynne Eccles and others has pointed to the need for providing programs and experiences designed specifically for this age group.

> Sound program planning must respond, not to some general notion of what they are like, but to the specific needs of their stage of development. In differentiating between early and late adolescence, we must recognize that there are few absolutes in human development. The differences are largely a matter of proportion and emphasis, but in the aggregate they are significant. (Schine, Shoup, & Harrington, 1981, p. 2)

Early adolescence is characterized primarily by change. Physical change is, of course, the most obvious, but cognitive and emotional changes, the loosening of ties to parents, and intensified importance attached to peer relationships, are equally significant. The move, in Piagetian terms, from concrete to abstract thinking, periods of extreme self-doubt, unpredictable and swift changes in mood are all normal developmental shifts. There is a dawning idealism and altruism, often seemingly at odds with a new absorption in self. A desire to reach out to adults other than parents and teachers, a drive to test values and to try on new roles, are all important developments of this period.

Involvement in community service can meet many of the special needs of the early adolescent. These have been described by Dorman, Lipsitz (1984), Lounsbury, Toepfer (1988), and others, and include:

- To develop a sense of competence, testing and discovering new skills.
- To discover a place for themselves in the world, to create a vision of a personal future.
- To participate in projects with tangible or visible outcomes.
- To know a variety of adults, representative of different backgrounds and occupations, including potential role models.
- To have the freedom to take part in the world of adults, but also to be free to retreat to a world of their peers.
- To test a developing value system in authentic situations.
- To speak and be heard, to know that they can make a difference.
- To achieve recognition for their accomplishments.
- To have opportunities to make real decisions, within appropriate limits.
- To receive support and guidance from adults who appreciate their problems and their promise.

Community service can give new meaning to classroom learning for young adolescents. Students use mathematics skills in planning a neighborhood improvement project, apply the reading, speaking, and listening skills of the language arts class when they record oral histories or read to preschoolers, gather data in order to formulate a plan of action. Writing logs or journals helps them to gain insights about the volunteer experience, and at the same time develops language skills. As adolescents perceive a connection between the classroom and the community, academic achievement is enhanced.

Educators, youth workers (including members of the juvenile justice system), and other observers of society express anxiety about the growing alienation of our young. Although the media's concern focuses on "at-risk" youth, (the dropout, runaway, drug user and/or seller, teen parent), many more youth are simply aimless or alienated. Both a cause and an effect of this alienation are the negative perceptions of today's adolescents so common among adults. But when young people become involved in service in their communities, the "we/they" stereotypes of both young and old are replaced by new perceptions and understanding.

An examination of the rationale for community service is not complete without some discussion of the pressures and debate surrounding the need for "values education" in the schools. While there is probably general agreement that the mission of the public schools includes education for citizenship, there is far less unanimity about what is meant by the broad term of "values education." The Baltimore County Public School Task Force report, 1984 and Beyond: A Reaffirmation of Values, identifies values that should be taught, among them: compassion, courtesy, equality of opportunity, regard for human worth and dignity, respect for others' rights. (Braveman, 1988) Nothing can be more effective in reinforcing these values than to enact them, as students will find when they perform in their communities.

Closely related to values education is education for responsible citizenship. The opportunity to make choices and to help to shape one's world is implicit in the democratic tradition; but it is through active participation and shouldering some part of the responsibility for one's immediate world, that the privileges of democratic citizenship are exercised and preserved.

Appropriate Roles for Young Adolescents

Most, if not all, young adolescents will derive benefits from engaging in meaningful service to their communities. Simply providing community roles will not guarantee a successful experience, but with careful advance planning and a "safety net" in place for the inevitable unanticipated problems that will arise, even an imperfect placement can become a growth experience. The type of service, the

way the young person is received at the placement site, the kinds of tasks and responsibilities he or she assumes, are among the factors that will determine the power of the experience. Of equal importance are the setting, the preparation the young people receive, the provision for ongoing reflection and learning, the quality of adult leadership, and the recognition and appreciation accorded the young volunteer.

There is fairly general agreement among those who work with junior high or middle school students in community service and among those who have observed these programs that the most meaningful roles for this age group involve interpersonal relationships. A reexamination of the developmental needs of the early adolescent, discussed above, reinforces the validity of this observation. Working with the very young or the aging, young volunteers enjoy the warm welcome and affection that greet them, and at the same time their self-esteem is bolstered by the knowledge that they are valued and do, indeed, "make a difference."

The Early Adolescent Helper Program, at the City University of New York's Center for Advanced Study in Education (CASE), has been promoting youth service for young adolescents since 1982, when it introduced the Child Care Helper Program in three New York City schools. Since that time, the Helper Program has spread to other states, and to 14 junior high and intermediate schools in New York. The Helper Program staff and consultants develop curriculum materials, train teachers and others to work with programs of youth service, and conduct research and evaluation.

Junior high and middle school participants in the Early Adolescent Helper Program serve in senior centers, school-age, and pre-school child care programs in the Bronx, Harlem, Brooklyn and Manhattan, and in Peekskill, New York, Bridgeport, Connecticut, and Phoenix, Arizona. The comment of one young Helper at program's end in the summer of 1987 is typical of youngsters who have participated as aides in day care or Headstart programs: "I will miss the children that came up to me and jumped on me because they where [sic] happy to see me." Another: "I will miss my name being called by the little children I worked with."

Research in two sites of the Early Adolescent Helper Program confirms this natural affinity between young teenagers and pre-school children. Classrooms of four-year-olds, with and without young "Helpers," were observed and videotaped over a two-year period. "Helpers and children develop a relationship with each other that is different from that which is developed between children and teachers. Helpers and children spend more time together in one-to-one relationships, interact more and ask for and receive more help....In these relationships, the Helper would at times act as an adult supervising the child, but at other times act as a child, playing with a 'special' friend." (Schine & Campbell, 1987, pp. 2-3)

Students become aware of their own growth as they accommodate to the needs of others. Journal entries reflect their progress and help them to place their experiences in a broader context: "I think I learned a lot about little kids and maybe even a little more about myself. From the little kids I learned that they can be a lot more difficult than I thought. Each one has a different need or a different quality... I also learned a lot about myself that I didn't know before. I got more compassionate and understanding with the kids as the weeks went on...." (Student Journal, Team 8II, Shoreham-Wading River Community Service Program, Shoreham, New York, 1988)

When young adolescents work with the elderly, they use different skills and learn about a very different aspect of human development. But their response - a new understanding of those different from themselves and of the continuum of human life - and their satisfaction are similar. At the Shoreham-Wading River Middle School on Long Island in New York all students have at least one community service experience before they leave the eighth grade. A student journal entry captures the meaning of this experience: The value of this whole experience for me is making them happy and changing their lives a bit....All in all I enjoyed the whole experience and I <u>think</u> I made a difference. (Student Journal, Shoreham-Wading River Community Service Program, 1988)

Some intergenerational programs capitalize on common interests of both old and young. Students in one Manhattan junior high school make a weekly visit during school hours to a nearby senior center where they join the center members in ceramics and art classes. They are working together on a musical comedy written by a senior center member. It will be staged for an audience of fellow students and center members at the end of the school year. In an unusual program in New Jersey several years ago, residents of a senior housing project and young people in a summer youth program collaborated in developing a forum around an issue of common interest. They decided to devote their combined efforts to developing a community conference on substance abuse, consulted with experts in the field, identified speakers and discussion leaders, issued invitations, and managed publicity. Their efforts culminated in a highly successful day of community education, but for the planners at least as significant were the understanding and the new relationships developed through the extended planning period.

Frequently, oral histories become the bridge for closing "the generation gap." In a rapidly changing neighborhood of Washington Heights in New York City, ten eighth grade students met with an oral historian to learn the techniques of interviewing and taping. In additional group meetings at the project's start, they talked about what "old" meant to them, described older persons they knew, and planned their introductory visit to the senior center. The project was called "Partners," and the young people understood that they would find a congenial "partner" to visit with and to interview. At

the same time, the center's director spoke with some of the senior citizens and invited their participation. The young people were all members of the "new" population of the neighborhood - Black or Central American - while the older participants, for the most part, were long-time residents - eastern European immigrants and a scattering of Central Americans.

As the weeks went by and the students with their tape recorders became familiar visitors, both the senior center director and the school coordinator saw reserve and mutual suspicion give way to interest and then to spontaneity and affection. Technically, the tapes presented problems; acoustics in the center could not be controlled. But more significant than any tangible product were the relationships and the learning that evolved. Said one student, "I learned that just because you're old doesn't mean you have nothing to give....It's wrong that they make them retire." And another, whose "partner" was a concentration camp survivor, summed up the program: "You can read about history in books, but when you hear about it from some one who was there, you know it's true."

This project has been discussed in detail for several reasons. First, it addressed a real need in a community where distrust and stereotyping separated not only generations but ethnic and social groups. Second, as the young people became caring listeners and questioners and the old shared their stories (and often advice), alliances and friendships were formed. Our society seldom values young adolescents or the old; in many ways, the message both receive is, "Don't bother us. The old have had their turn; the young can wait." In their sharing and learning, both populations were important to each other. The elderly, like young adolescents, may suffer from low self-esteem; both benefit from knowing that they have indeed made a difference to another person. Third, the students, seeing a purpose in becoming more proficient listeners, speakers, and writers, willingly worked on improving their communication skills.

Sponsorship of Youth Community Service

School-Based Programs

A growing number of high schools have added community service to their elective curriculum offerings. In Maryland a proposal to make community service a graduation requirement failed, but all school districts in the state are now required to offer high school credit for volunteer service. At least two cities - Atlanta and Detroit - have made community service a prerequisite for the high school diploma. Detroit requires 200 hours of community service for graduation, Atlanta requires 75. (Barden, New York Times, 11/30/88) Junior high and middle schools have been slower to include community service in the regular school curriculum. Even at the high school level, the school's role too often is simply that of recruiter of volunteers, and there is little or no recognition of the rich

possibilities service offers for enhancing and enriching the academic curriculum. Provision for preparation and reflection is the exception rather than the norm.

When students work in child care programs, they can not only learn about child development but can also explore the changing family and the factors that have created a demand for new structures to meet the needs of children and families. Work with the disabled can lead to discussion of the role of laws in protecting special populations, or to learning about successful individuals who overcame their disabilities. Working with the elderly may open the whole subject of the place of work in the life of the individual, retirement, the history of the Social Security laws in this country, the contribution of the immigrant in the nation's ongoing development, and so on. Very few school-based programs have made these curriculum connections to any significant degree, although especially in the middle grades they offer an opportunity to awaken interest in whole areas for study and to make such study relevant to the "real world" experiences of the student.

An excellent example of the curriculum potential of service is the program of the Shoreham-Wading River Middle School. It has perhaps the oldest, and surely one of the most complete, programs of community service in the country. Service, combined with classroom preparation and discussion, has been included in the school's offerings since it opened 15 years ago. "People promote community service for high schools," says Joanne Urgese, Community Service Coordinator (a full-time position at Shoreham), "and don't realize how good middle school students will be."

While in some schools community service is a club activity or at best an elective in those few middle schools with the flexibility to offer electives, at Shoreham community service is integrated into the curriculum. Any teacher in any curriculum area may elect to make community service a part of his/her course. In addition to Urgese, there are three part-time "community service specialists" who process teacher requests for a community service unit, arrange the student placements, provide liaison with site supervisors, make transportation arrangements, and administer the program. The participating teacher may select any of the community service activities for the class. These run the gamut from assisting with Headstart to visiting patients in a nursing home. Now that the program's reputation is solidly established in the community, it is not unusual for Winifred Pardo, the former coordinator of the community service program and now the school's Administrative Assistant, or Urgese, to receive requests for student volunteers from community agencies.

This reputation has been earned because of the program's consistent emphasis on preparation and debriefing throughout the period of the community service unit, typically 10 weeks. In fact, at Shoreham there is a 2:1 ratio of class sessions to on-site

participation. One of the two weekly sessions is devoted to planning for the on-site role. Shoreham volunteers are expected to plan an activity; planning may be done by the group as a whole or by an individual. A second session is devoted to debriefing -- reviewing the on-site experience, deciding what might have been better planned or executed, what was particularly successful, and how the young people felt about their participation. Students in the Shoreham program keep journals as an aid in reflecting on their experiences as well as a valuable exercise in using written language to enhance one's own understanding.

One cannot overstate the importance of the reflective component in ensuring that community service is truly meaningful for the young adolescent.

> To say that experience is a good teacher...does not imply that it's easily or automatically so. If it were, we'd all be a lot wiser than we are. It's true that we can learn much from experience. We may also learn nothing. Or we may, like Mark Twain's apocryphal cat who learned from sitting on a hot stove lid never to sit again, learn the wrong lesson. The key, as Aldous Huxley explained, is that 'experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him.' That can be nothing....It is through reflection and experience--thinking about it, talking about it--that we begin, as Huxley wrote, to <u>do</u> something with what happens to us. (Conrad, 1982, p. 4)

Another model for school-based programs is found in some schools that include kindergarten or pre-school through eighth grade. We can look back to an earlier day to the one-room school where older children were expected to assume some responsibility for the learning and socialization of younger students. In an Early Adolescent Helper Program site in Bridgeport, Connecticut, seventh and eighth grade students assist in the kindergartens and primary grades throughout the school day. One of the two kindergarten classrooms is never without a student "Helper." They create special crafts projects, help with reading readiness activities, escort the group to the school library, read aloud, organize playground games, or fill in where they are needed.

This in-school service model has several advantages: it circumvents the need for transportation - almost always a problem; it eases communication between site supervisor (the kindergarten teacher) and the middle school teacher; and it allows the young volunteer to focus on the activities and on the younger children and not be distracted by the need to adjust to a strange environment. A disadvantage of this arrangement is that the time spent in the classroom is seldom more than one period because of the demands of the older student's schedule. When a class is missed, it is up to the student to arrange to make up the work. This is a problem

whenever the service is scheduled during the school day unless, as at Shoreham, it is fully integrated into the curriculum. Other teachers may be unwilling to permit absences; this is especially true if they are not directly involved or well informed as to the structure and goals of the community service program.

At Folwell Junior High School in Minneapolis, seventh- and eighth-graders enrolled in "Project Humanity" are released from class to teach students in the "TMR" (Trainable Mentally Retarded) class to tell time, to count money, to read key safety words such as warning signs and to communicate with peers in their weekly tutoring sessions. Since 1984 Thad Krane, Special Education teacher, has trained the Project Humanity tutors, developed detailed lesson plans for them to use, and encouraged their efforts to help their "tutees" join the mainstream of junior high life. The tutors may invent games that both reinforce their teaching and promote interaction, or they may escort the special education students to lunch. Over the first four years, nearly 300 Folwell students served as peer tutors, as part of their Social Studies programs. More recently the number of tutors has been limited by staffing and schedule changes. The program is now affiliated with Fresh Force, a city-wide program that promotes and recognizes junior high students' contributions to the Minneapolis community.

A somewhat different example of a service program based and implemented entirely within the schools is the Valued Youth Partnership program, in San Antonio. Students identified as "dropout-prone" tutor elementary school children from five to eight hours each week. The program is sponsored by IDRA, the Intercultural Development Research Association. IDRA reports that "among its findings for middle school students have been improved school attitudes and behavior." (Harrington & Schine, in press) IDRA staff provides intensive training for the teacher coordinators who work directly with the tutors. The tutors, in turn, are trained in an accredited school course, improving their own basic academic skills as they learn to teach similar skills at the elementary school.

Many school-based programs arrange for the on-site placements when school is not in session. When young adolescents are involved in internships or service roles in the hours after school, another pervasive problem is addressed. The 11- to 14-year-old often is the unacknowledged "latchkey child." Most communities are aware of the need for school-age child care and have initiated some (though seldom enough) programs. Few, however, have provided for the early adolescent. Traditional after school programs such as clubs or hobby groups no longer attract them, but left on their own, some youngsters can be lured by the life of the street and slip into experimentation with alcohol, drugs, or sex. At best, self-reports of these young people indicate that many spend the after-school hours alone at home, watching television. Yet, this is a critical period in development when choices are made that can determine a life path, when a variety of interests and life options can be presented, and young people

helped to develop a sense of the possible. At an age when they hunger for new experiences and wider contacts with adults, when their own developmental needs virtually compel them to seek challenge and to risk, the after-school hours can be a time for positive experiences in community service that will meet those needs in a protected and protective environment.

Experience with programs of community service for young adolescents points to the desirability of establishing such programs under school sponsorship. There is a certain status attached to activities based in the school, even among adolescents who seem alienated from all aspects of the school life. The school is the institution best able to provide for the reflective component that is a critical element in making a community service program meaningful. It is the place where, one hopes, there are caring adults who can serve as discussion leaders and help the students integrate their community service experience with their learning. Adults can create a climate of trust and concern in the seminar or group discussion, one in which collaboration and cooperative problem-solving are the norm rather than the exception. In addition, school sponsorship reassures the staff at the placement site that the program will be monitored and sustained, and allays parents' anxieties. The school itself gains as new connections are forged with the community. The image of the school as isolated and inaccessible is a common one; when the school and its students become partners in contributing to the community, negative perceptions are altered. Finally, if we believe that <u>all</u> young adolescents can benefit from participating in programs of community service and that all <u>can</u> make a contribution, it follows that the single institution with access to virtually the entire cohort should be the logical base for these programs.

Community service programs are appropriate for virtually any population group of adolescents and any community. Programs are found in urban schools that enroll numbers of "at risk" students and in affluent suburban districts. The young volunteers reflect the diversity of their communities. They include those labelled "gifted and talented," students with limited English proficiency, and students considered to be "at risk." The power of these programs is not determined by the academic, social or economic level of the participants, or even by the resources of the school district, but rather by the way in which they respond to the developmental needs of the young participants and to the needs of the community.

Program implementation is unquestionably simpler and more efficient when a district can allocate staff and can supply support services. Provision for transportation, support staff, and a budget for "extras" to reward the young volunteers, are indeed desirable, but a sound community service program can be initiated and sustained at low cost to the school and to the benefit of all. Unlike many innovative programs, no costly supplies need be purchased, nor is there a need for special equipment or space. The one indispensable

resource is the time of the staff - teachers or counselors - who will guide the young volunteers.

Community-based Programs

Even if every middle school were to offer community service in its program, the experience of active participation in the community, of making a positive difference, can be so significant that it should be readily available to young people in a variety of settings. There is almost no limit to the opportunities for volunteer service in every community. The Girls Clubs of America, Boy Scouts, Camp Fire, Girl Scouts, churches, synagogues, settlement houses, Rotary, Boys Clubs, fraternal organizations, local hospitals, and the Red Cross are among the organizations that may sponsor community service projects or programs for young people. In recent years, many of the national youth-serving organizations have recognized a need to rethink their programs for young adolescents to reflect the changing interests and attitudes of the age group. A renewed emphasis on community service has resulted.

There are some projects more suited to a non-school base, and some youngsters who will more readily participate in a program sponsored by a youth group or community organization outside of the school. Some of the practical problems faced by schools in implementing service programs do not exist in other settings. Agencies are not constrained by the 50-minute class period, nor by legislated curriculum requirements. Often there is a wide range of age groups, even of generations, within a community center, a "Y" or a settlement house. Young adolescents can assume new roles, although in a familiar environment, by becoming service providers.

A demonstration project of the Girls Clubs of America permits 12- to 14-year-olds to learn through teaching, to test themselves as leaders, and challenges them to question assumptions. "Friendly PEERsuasion" is a substance abuse prevention program that trains young adolescents to teach younger children about harmful substances, and about how to use "refusal skills." In the informal youth agency setting, the young people can practice leadership and decision-making, and develop their own teaching strategies.

A major goal of the Girls' Clubs is to empower girls with a sense of their own competence. There is also emphasis on cooperation effort as a strategy for achieving group objectives. Contrasting her role as a member of the peer educator team with her school experience, on "PEERsuader" in Arlington, Texas, commented, "It's good to have the group get credit instead of just one person getting singled out." The non-school program is free of the aura of competition that may pervade the classroom where students are graded and classified, and is thus able to foster cooperative effort, emphasizing shared goals and achievements.

Another feature of community-based programs not easily available in schools is flexibility in scheduling. Without the constraints of accommodating to the school calendar, agency-sponsored programs may run for varied time periods. The New York State 4-H Clubs' Youth Volunteers program sponsors three types of community service opportunities: community improvement; leadership, through serving as assistant 4-H leaders; and working in after-school programs. Recognizing that young adolescents' enthusiasms are often volatile, some projects continue for as little as ten weeks; others may last far longer. Duration can be determined by the interest of the participants and the type of activity, rather than an arbitrary time frame. Another distinguishing feature of the Youth Volunteers program is its leadership. 4-H Clubs rely heavily on volunteer adult leaders, and the leader's role is crucial in the Youth Volunteer program, where training and reflection are emphasized. The importance of volunteerism is thus demonstrated in two ways in this model, where the contributions of both adults and young people are critical to the program's success.

Community-based programs may have more freedom than do schools to become involved in social action or community change. Political considerations may place constraints on some kinds of social action in a school-sponsored program, but might be of less concern under other sponsorship.

Collaborative sponsorship offers still another framework for youth community service. A community-based organization or social service agency and the school may bring complementary resources to the undertaking. For example, the child guidance center might share in training students who are to work in a child care program. A staff member of the United Way might work with the school in developing a unit on employment opportunities in the human services as part of the school's career exploration curriculum. Cooperative programming might involve students, community agency and school staff in a neighborhood needs assessment, and in identifying ways to meet those needs through youth community service.

Whether the program emanates from the school, another agency or a partnership, some caveats apply. Whatever role the young adolescent assumes, the task must be real. These young people are quick to recognize the "phony" and quick to sense and resent exploitation. The work, then, cannot be "busy work," nor should the young simply be given tasks that the regular staff wants to avoid.

The "one-shot" service experience should, like fund-raising, be carefully weighed before any action is taken. Often staff members will describe a school as engaging in community service, because the chorus sings carols at a hospital in December or students have collected money for famine in Africa. While efforts of this kind do indeed make a contribution, it is important to distinguish between the projects that foster caring attitudes and behaviors - experiences that by their nature promote learning and growth - and the

short-lived, comparatively shallow satisfaction of the isolated project that does not truly engage the individual. This is not to say that such activities are worthless, or that all such efforts should be rejected. They may provide the impetus for becoming involved in service in greater depth.

Even some "stand-alone" experiences may have real impact. For example, students in an intermediate school in Manhattan assisted in the distribution of cheese in the government's surplus food program at a center in their own neighborhood. They discussed world hunger beforehand, and later in a de-briefing session they shared their new understanding of hunger and its victims, resulting from their first-hand experience. In spite of instances such as this, the realization that one can truly make a difference in the community or in the lives of others, and that service is an ongoing element in democratic citizenship, more often results when there is continuity and ongoing involvement.

The Placement Site and the Students

Earlier in this discussion it was suggested that the most appropriate community service roles involve young adolescents in helping relationships with others, especially those different from themselves either in age, race, occupational or social identity. People question the willingness of agencies to accept volunteers as young as middle grade students. However, in six years of operating in New York City, the Early Adolescent Helper Program was refused only once in seeking a placement site. In that instance, the director of a child care program admitted that her resistance resulted from a negative experience with a high school work-study program the previous year. She subsequently invited the Helper Program to place middle school students in the center and has continued to accept Helpers each year. Placement sites appreciate the energy and enthusiasm young adolescents bring to new situations. And most human service professionals are pleased at the prospect of introducing young people to their fields, perhaps even recruiting another professional for the future.

There are differences in choosing placements for young adolescents and for high school students. The vulnerability of younger students, their struggle to make sense of their world and to deal with the realities of death, deformity, or mental and emotional disabilities, dictates that staff at the receiving agency should not only be willing to accept them but be prepared to help them understand and reach out to the people with whom they will work. If the students will work with the frail elderly, there should be some advance discussion about death and dying, as well as of aging. Whatever the setting, the high school student may be comfortable simply engaging in the activities of the day; a younger brother or sister, on the other hand, needs the assurance of a staff member who is aware of the volunteer, who can offer constructive criticism and

positive reinforcement, and who understands early adolescents and is genuinely pleased to have them at the agency.

A creative approach to community service for the middle school student will also see the school itself as a community to be served. While this might not be attractive for the high school volunteer, peer tutoring, assisting in a classroom, even improving the appearance of the school building and grounds, are roles that middle school students can enjoy and, with skilled adult direction, find meaningful. Such participation may prepare the less mature or shy student to venture beyond the school at a later date.

Adult coordinators of school community service programs frequently are asked whom they recruit and how the participants are selected. A common and erroneous assumption is that volunteer service is a middle class activity, and that inner city, poor youngsters will not enroll for work without pay. In fact, student interest in community services seems unrelated to race, class or academic achievement and ability. Observation suggests that youngsters in inner city neighborhoods may sign up more readily than their suburban counterparts for whom there are competing activities - extra-curricular sports and clubs, lessons and hobbies - in the after-school hours. Time and again, we hear of the youngster who has shown no particular talent or interest within the traditional school program but who "shines" in caring for others.

> I've seen kids who were holy terrors in school, one- half hour later wheeling old people slowly down the corridors of a nursing home. I've seen students talk about lobbying for a bicycle path hours after class had been dismissed. They are not too young to make a difference and they won't disappoint you if the task is real and is theirs to own. (Littky, 1986, p. 1)

Increasingly, community service is an element, or even a requirement, in programs that target "at risk" students. The premise is that finding satisfaction and recognition in serving others will strengthen the individual's self-image, and that this in turn will enable him or her to improve academically. New York City's AIDP (Attendance Improvement/Dropout Prevention) program includes a required "Career Exploration" component. Coordinators report improved attendance and attitude in groups where active community service roles replace or supplement the traditional classroom discussion and presentations on the world of work.

Successful outcomes, measured in terms of academic gains and of attitude, have been repeatedly reported in studies of peer and cross-age tutoring. Hedin (1987) cites studies of the effect of the tutoring experience on the academic achievement of the tutors: over a wide range of tutoring programs, tutors' achievement test scores exceeded those of control students in the subjects being taught. In

addition, "small, positive change in attitude toward subject matter and self-concept were also found for tutors." (Hedin, 1987, p .45)

In a promising variation, young adolescents (10-12 year olds) with learning disabilities and behavioral problems in Buffalo, New York, became tutors for 6-8 year-olds with similar difficulties. The Special Education teacher who developed the program recognized the power of taking responsibility for helping some one else: "The low functioning, failing child suddenly becomes a teacher. This peer tutoring system tells this child, 'You are worthwhile and productive.'" (NY State Council on Children and Families, 1982, p. 7.)

Community service programs are suitable for nearly all junior high or middle school students. The best involve a cross-section of abilities, as well as whatever socio-economic, racial or ethnic mix exists in the school. These programs appear to be especially valuable as a component of programs serving "at risk" youth. Young people who have "tuned out" in the classroom are attentive and caring when helping a nursing home resident; unenthusiastic readers will practice reading a story book in order to read aloud in the pre-school.

Community Service in Middle School Reform

There is widespread agreement among educators and others that reform is urgently needed at the junior high or middle school level. (Cawelti, 1988; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1985; New York State Department of Education, 1988) Unanimity in defining that reform or in visualizing restructuring is harder to find. However, given what we know about the developmental needs and characteristics of early adolescents, it is evident that the answer does not lie in "more of the same" or the "get tough" emphasis on content that is advocated in some quarters. No single formula or program will meet all needs, nor serve the diverse population of our public schools. However, based on what we know of early adolescents - their need to move about, to test, to increase their autonomy, to be accepted, and to develop a sense of self-worth - it is not unreasonable to suggest that community service is uniquely suited to meeting the needs of the middle school student. Every student, regardless of intellectual ability, career aspirations, or family background, will need to be equipped for living in a very different century, in an environment and society we cannot fully anticipate.

> The content of today's curriculum serves primarily to develop intellectual habits and capacities that are likely to be applicable to other times and settings. The curriculum must balance skill development with content coverage, which may be outdated before it is used. To prepare youth for the future, the middle level school curriculum must develop intellectual skills and <u>an</u>

> understanding of humankind that will permit the student to gather information, organize it in a meaningful fashion, evaluate its veracity and utility, form reasonable conclusions about it, and plan for individual and collective action. [Emphasis added.] (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1985, p. 5)

Community service can help a student to develop such an understanding, challenge him or her to collect and analyze relevant information, and to plan and take action. The service experience and the academic curriculum together can provide the student with a more coherent school experience than even the best classroom-bound course of study.

Barriers to Community Service

With few exceptions, the experience of practitioners who have initiated service programs in schools serving early adolescents suggests that implementation, no matter how convincing the evidence or how committed the staff, will face obstacles. Perhaps the most pervasive, and the most difficult to overcome, appears under the banner of "reform." Some 35 states have introduced initiatives that either add hours to the school day, more course requirements for the high school diploma, remedial classes in reading and computing, or that place greater emphasis on standardized test scores. New York State illustrates this problem: the Regents Action Plan, developed at least partially in response to A Nation at Risk, requires more minutes in the school week than some middle or junior high school schedules allow. Some administrators are reducing offerings in the arts, others are eliminating homerooms. Gordon Cawelti points out, "The school reform movement has reduced the amount of time for elective or exploratory courses by increasing the number or required courses at the intermediate and secondary levels....The content of curriculum is clearly changing in many intermediate-level schools because of the increase in specific requirements from state departments of education." (Cawelti, 1988, pp. 10-11)

Concerned about covering a tightly-defined curriculum, only the most creative school administrators will find ways to provide the time and personnel essential to introducing and maintaining a quality community service program. There are, however, indications that a second wave of "reform" will seek to restore balance. New York State has issued a Draft Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education and Schools with Middle-Level Grades that recognizes (and lists explicitly) the developmental traits of this age group. Moreover, it calls for "opportunities within the school program [for middle school students] to develop as individuals" and suggests further: "Schools enrolling middle-level students should...have schedules with flexible time assignments within blocks of time to encourage interdisciplinary programs and creative time use." (New York State Department of Education, 1988, p. 5)

Other barriers to integrating community service into the school arise when the program is, in effect, an "add-on" - the status community service occupies in most middle level schools at present. When students miss regularly scheduled classes, they must make up the work missed, but there is seldom a make-up session or other support available to them. Rarely are any concessions made in recognition of their participation. This makes it more difficult for the very students who may benefit most - those who are struggling with academic work - to take advantage of the program. Few schools at this level use modular scheduling or any of the other devices that permit double class periods or other flexible arrangements. Consequently, it is difficult to juxtapose the scheduling of the discussion/reflection group and the work placement to complement each other. There also may be a "public relations" problem in the school; faculty colleagues need to understand the purposes, anticipated outcomes, and structure of the community service program, lest it be perceived as a "frill" or a sinecure for the teacher/leader.

Conclusion

Young adolescents face a complex future. Public education is not now successful in preparing many of them to face and manage that future with either confidence or competence. There is public debate and deep division over values education, and a sense that we are failing to transmit the common core values of our country to our children. Acts of violence occur daily in junior high and middle schools. Those under 15 years old are the only population group for whom the birth rate is not declining. Employers tell us that high school graduates have not mastered the basic skills. Less than one-half of the nation's eligible voters went to the polls in the last national election, and among the youngest eligible voters (18 to 24) the drop in turnout for 1988 was the greatest of any age group. (New York Times, March 12, 1989, Sec. 1, p. 25) Yet against this background, the altruism, curiosity and eagerness of early adolescence persists. The challenge is to create environments and opportunities that will allow those qualities to develop, "to nurture young people in their initial quest toward an effective and satisfying adulthood." (Hornbeck, 1988, p. 12)

No program, however rich, will be a panacea. But there can be little doubt that a strong program of community service, structured to give every young adolescent an opportunity to participate and to experience the empowerment that comes with making a difference, can be a positive step toward addressing some of the critical problems cited. Service opportunities can be made available without draining the resources of a school district. By providing community service, young adolescents will practice skills they already have and take on responsibility for their neighbors and their environment, reviving a tradition of cooperative effort that is essential for the survival of

a democratic society. Not least, our communities will gain in badly needed services.

Establishing community service as an integral part of the program in middle level schools could constitute an important first step in true reform. The Committee for Economic Development dubs the junior high school "the neglected alleyway of education reform." (Committee for Economic Development, 1985, p. 47) Community service programs offer one way to convert that alleyway into a relatively smooth avenue leading to schools restructured for the 21st century, where young adolescents can acquire the skills and attitudes that will enable them to lead happy and constructive lives.

The journal entry of an eighth grade boy whose community service project had just concluded indicates that his volunteer experience at a residence for the aging helped to start him on the route to that goal. He writes, "I guess the most important thing I got out of this experience is that I learned I can do just about whatever is asked of me as long as I prepare and give it my best shot...."

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